The pride of North Carolina's electric cooperatives

Volume 37, No. 12, December 2005

Carolina country



Holiday Reflections

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Cranberry Nut Dessert

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North Carolina's electric cooperatives provide reliable, safe and affordable electric service to 850,000 homes, farms and businesses in North Carolina. The 27 electric cooperatives are each member-owned, not-for-profit and overseen by a board of directors elected by the membership.

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Carolina Country magazine is available monthly to members of North Carolina's electric cooperatives. If you are a member of one of these cooperatives but do not receive Carolina Country, you may request a subscription by calling Member Services at the office of your cooperative. If your address has changed, please inform your cooperative.



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When Daddy, the electrician, hung the Christmas lights, and other memorable moments of the holiday season.





ON THE COVER
Alvin Dunn Jr., age 2 years and 10 months, is happily seated on his very own Farmall that Santa brought him for Christmas 1954. During October of that year he went with his Grandpa to Kinston to sell tobacco, and they stopped by the International Harvester place. When Junior saw the little tractors, he began begging for one "just like Grandpa's." He still owns the tractor today. The photo from Ada Dunn of Pink Hill is one that appears in the book "Carolina Country Reflections." See pages 6 and 7.



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Raising your own prices



By Craig A. Conrad

Let's say you are in the vegetable business. You own a business that buys vegetables wholesale and supplies them to neighborhood grocers throughout North Carolina. Let's say California is in its second year of drought, and Florida, the Gulf states and your local farmers were ravaged recently by hurricanes, and they're telling you they need to charge you more for their surviving tomatoes, lettuce, carrots and celery. You have contracts with some of them that require you to buy their vegetables through the end of this season, but you go ahead and look around for another source of vegetables, maybe in Mexico or Pennsylvania, to try and maintain your price for your grocers.

All your suppliers, no matter where they are, say they are paying $3 per gallon to fuel vehicles that cost them $2 per gallon six months ago. Some tell you their fertilizer prices just shot up 20 percent. Some say health insurance for their workers is costing them 30 percent more this year. You're paying $3 per gallon for your own trucks now. Your suppliers jack up their vegetable prices to help pay for their fuel, fertilizer, labor and everything else.

So you try to rearrange your trucking routes to cut back on fuel and labor costs. You even wonder if maybe a fleet of horses and wagons would be an alternative.

You check prices for other vegetables that you might substitute for the high-priced tomatoes and lettuce, at least for a while. Maybe squash and sweet potatoes look good right now.

But your grocers need vegetables now. They need tomatoes and lettuce.

Finally, you raise the prices on those vegetables in order to stay in business.

Well, you do own a business: your electric utility. And your suppliers of electric power who have managed to hold their prices steady for many years are facing rising costs for producing that power.

Most of the power supplied to your cooperative is generated from burning natural gas produced in the South and Midwest and coal from Appalachian regional mines. (Some also is produced by the Catawba Nuclear Station in York County, S.C.) The price of natural gas used to generate electricity has risen more than 20 percent just in the past few months and 400 percent since 1999. The price of coal has gone up 21 percent since 2004 and as much as 80 percent overall since 2000.

Factors that have affected natural gas prices over the past year include: U.S. production negatively impacted by Hurricane Ivan in 2004, rising crude oil prices, a warmer than normal summer of 2005, an active hurricane season (primarily Katrina and Rita), and strong U.S. and international economies.

Reasons for coal price increases include: increased global demand, less movement to expand supply, swells in transportation costs and new environmental regulations. As demand for coal has recently increased in other countries, there is more international competition and less exportation of coal from countries that were traditionally exporters. The principle of supply and demand tells us that when supply is plentiful, prices are low. However, when demand increases, so does the price.

Your Touchstone Energy cooperative is one of 26 in North Carolina that buy wholesale electric power as a group—as a cooperative, in fact. That cooperative—North Carolina Electric Membership Corporation—combining our wholesale power needs, is one of the largest purchasers of wholesale power in the country. North Carolina's cooperatives also are members of The Alliance for Cooperative Energy Services Power Marketing (ACES Power Marketing), one of the nation's largest electricity traders, which represents and guides more than 230 cooperatives in the wholesale energy trading and risk management business.

Buying in bulk and operating as a group enables us to command lower prices for energy than we could if we were buying and trading solely for our own needs. These collective purchases include various fuel-purchase contracts that are negotiated to stabilize costs as much as possible.

But we have reached the point at most of our cooperatives where we must pay for the higher cost of power. While we do our best to introduce efficiencies in our operations, to apply new technology, and simply to save energy, we still must pay for these higher wholesale prices. Many of you may be seeing that higher price in your bills, perhaps as what we call the "wholesale power cost adjustment."

The way to look at it is that you are paying more to keep your business running.

The good part of all this is that we keep you informed of how your business is running, which means when we see these wholesale power prices adjust downward, we can eventually reduce the price to members.

As always, you are part of this business. Whatever you can do to contain your own energy use—to use electricity and all other energy as carefully as you can—will have a positive effect on energy supply and price. We inform you of ways to do that, too. Remember: we're in this business together.

Craig Conrad is CEO of Carteret-Craven Electric Cooperative, which serves more than 35,000 members in Carteret, Craven, Jones and Onslow counties. He also chairs the statewide Power Supply Committee for the North Carolina Electric Membership Corporation and serves on the board of ACES Power Marketing.

Get help with your political campaign

North Carolina's electric cooperatives offer a program to help candidates for public office learn the skills to build effective campaigns. The cooperatives will host two non-partisan Campaign Academies in Hickory and Greenville on Jan. 31 and Feb. 2, respectively. The seminars are open to all candidates and potential candidates.

The cooperative Campaign Academy seminars will feature guest speakers experienced with both state and federal campaigns. Also, a representative from the State Board of Elections will talk about North Carolina campaign finance law.

Each session begins at 8:30 a.m. and costs $30. The Jan. 31 academy will be held at the Holiday Inn Select in Hickory, and the Feb. 2 session will be held at the Hilton Hotel in Greenville.

To sign up or learn more, contact Carolyn Childers with the North Carolina Association of Electric Cooperatives at (919) 875-3107 or carolyn.childers@ncemcs.com

The Johnson Cotton Co. mule

One year, Grandpa Duncan and Grandma Kinnie decided to rent a mule from the Johnson Cotton Co. Once the mule was on the farm, we learned that he truly had a mind of his own. When it came to work, that mule wanted no part of it.

Every time Grandpa Duncan pointed him down the field in the middle, to avoid tearing up the tobacco or corn stalks, that mule would go off to the right or left and destroy the crops.

Well, after a few days of this, Grandpa Duncan decided that mule had to go. He instructed Hosea to write a letter to the Johnson Cotton Co. That's when Grandma Kinnie came in and said, "Dear Mr. Johnson. Please come get mule before we kill mule, or mule kills us."

The Johnson Cotton Co. came and retrieved their mule.

Jackie Johnson
Garland
Four County Electric

Sparta scenes

This picture was taken from my porch in Sparta looking at the mountains and Blue Ridge Electric lines.

Norma Dora
Sparta
Blue Ridge Electric



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This is a Carolina Country scene in Touchstone Energy territory. If you know where it is, send your answer by December 6 with your name, address, phone number and the name of your electric cooperative.

By e-mail: where@carolinacountry.com

Or by mail: Where in Carolina Country?
P.O. Box 27306
Raleigh, NC 27611.

The winner, chosen at random and announced in our January issue, will receive $25.

The Winner:

The scene in the November magazine showed smiley faces on rocks at the home of Kenneth and Kathleen Green. The spot is on Hwy. 209 north, Rush Fork Rd. in the Fines Creek community of Haywood County, in the Haywood EMC service area. It's on the way to Jerry's Store and the Junaluska post office. Correct answers were numbered and the $25 winner chosen at random was Faye Ledford of Clyde.



Looking at the way we were



Granny at Christmas, 1968

I took this photo of my grandmother Elizabeth Sharpe at Christmas 1968 with the new Polaroid "Swinger" camera Santa brought for me. I was 10. Granny was preparing the holiday bird and baking a cake. Each Christmas she made potato candy to give to everyone, including the janitor at my school. She raised me until she passed away in 1972. I miss her and named my daughter after her.

"Granny's Tater Candy"

1 small potato
1 box powdered sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
Peanut butter

Cook potato and mash until smooth. Add vanilla. Work in powdered sugar until soft dough forms. Roll out to a quarter-inch thick. Spread with peanut butter. Roll up and slice into half-inch slices.

Jo Lynn Coble, Liberty

Christmas Cowboys, 1962

Our two youngest sons really enjoyed the cowboy suits and the teddy bears they got for Christmas in 1962. Pictured are Ralph Brinkley of Ahoskie (left) and Steve Brinkley of Greenville.

Margaret Brinkley, Ahoskie

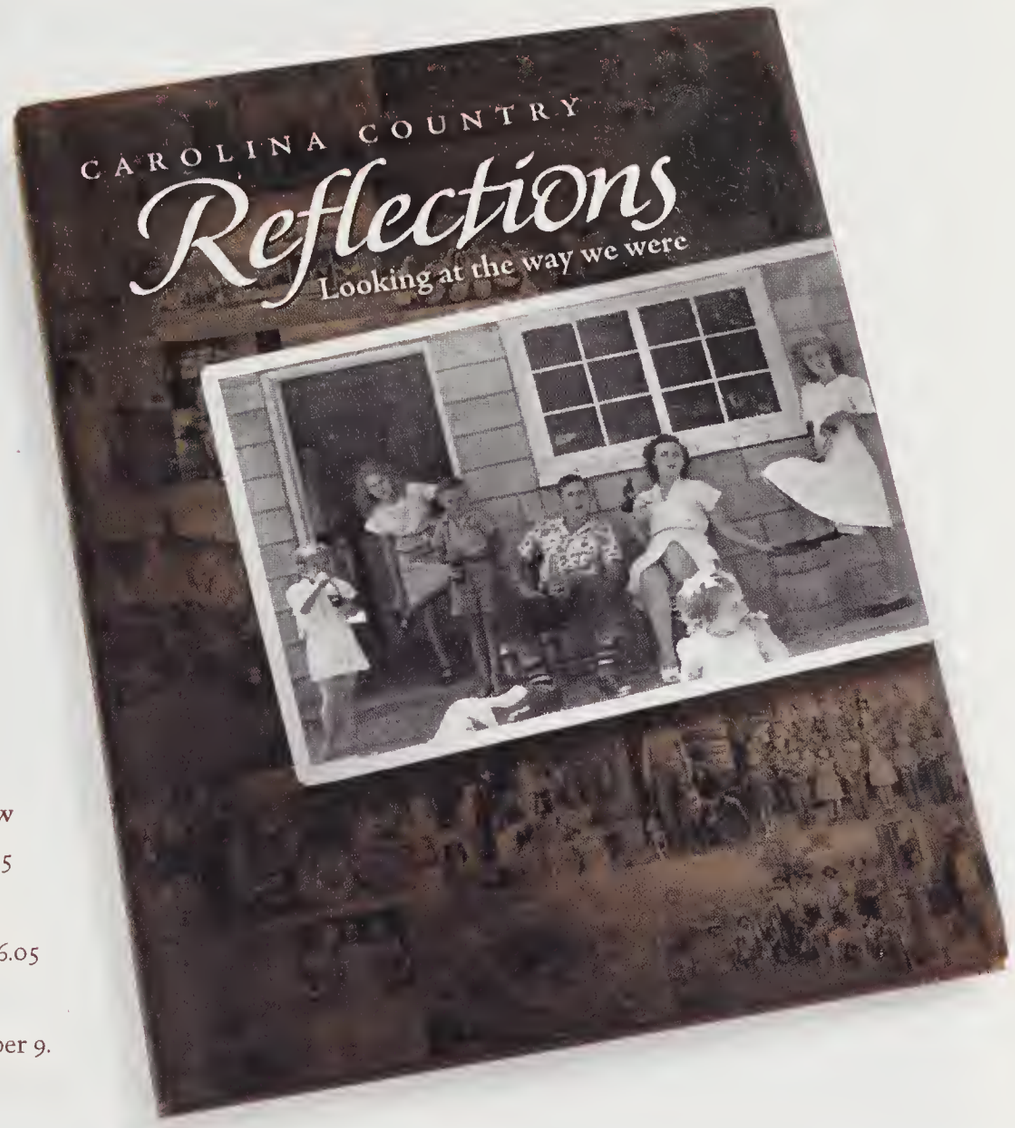
December Minks, 1959

This is George Brown, 33, with his youngest son Carl, 3, and me to the left at 7. Dad ran a trap line through Davie, Yadkin and Iredell counties from the 1950s into the 1970s. He specialized in catching mink. There are 17 mink hides in this picture, which would be a two-week catch. This picture was taken on a Sunday afternoon, because the Chevy pickup with the box on the back belonged to Frank Pierce of North Wilkesboro, who came every other Sunday to buy our fur. It was in December 1959 in our front yard in Davie County.

Joe Brown, Winston-Salem

These are selections from "Carolina Country Reflections: Looking at the Way We Were," a new book published by the North Carolina Association of Electric Cooperatives. For information about ordering the book, see page 7.

NOW AVAILABLE



"**Carolina Country Reflections**," a book of nearly 200 photographs showing life in rural North Carolina before 1970, is now available for shipping. The pictures show scenes of families, farms, working, gatherings, fun times and everyday life, along with the stories behind the pictures.

This is a limited edition printing of a high-quality, hardcover "coffee table book," measuring 8½ x 11 inches with 160 pages. **Now available for the special price of $46** ($38.95 plus $4.32 shipping and $2.73 sales tax). After January 1, 2006, the price is $52 ($42.95 plus $6.05 shipping and $3.00 sales tax). To help ensure delivery by Christmas, place orders by December 9. For two-day delivery, add $10 per book.

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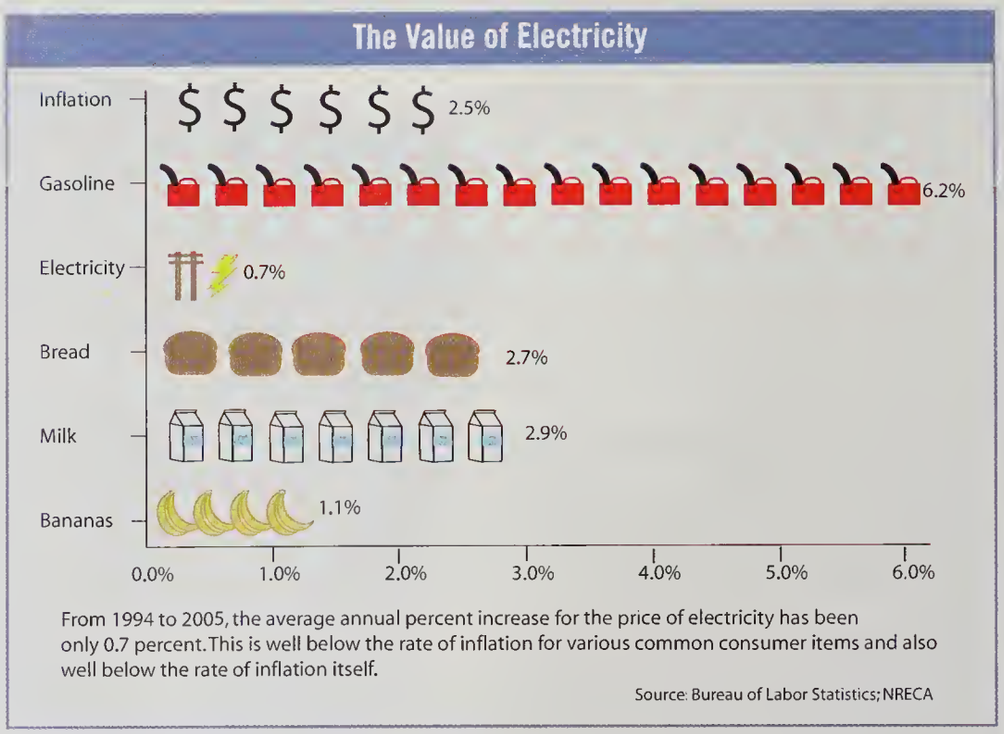
Expect to pay more for your home heating energy this winter

This winter, residential space-heating bills are projected to increase for all fuel types compared to year-ago levels, according to forecasts released by the Energy Information Administration.

Customers who rely on electricity to heat their homes will pay more this winter, although not as much as natural gas, oil or propane users, the agency said in its most recent "Short-Term Energy Outlook."

On average, households heating primarily with natural gas can expect to spend about $350 (48 percent) more this winter on fuel. Households heating primarily with heating oil can expect to pay, on average, $378 (32 percent) more this winter. Households heating primarily with propane can expect to pay, on average, $325 (30 percent) more this winter. Households heating primarily with electricity can expect, on average, to pay $38 (5 percent) more.

These averages provide a broad guide to changes from last winter, but fuel expenses for individual households are highly dependent on local weather conditions, the size and efficiency of individual homes and their heating equipment, and thermostat settings.



From 1994 to 2005, the average annual percent increase for the price of electricity has been only 0.7 percent. This is well below the rate of inflation for various common consumer items and also well below the rate of inflation itself.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics; NRECA

Prices for petroleum and natural gas will remain high due to tight international supplies of crude and hurricane-induced supply losses. Continued high crude oil prices had been expected prior to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Complete recovery of energy infrastructure from hurricane damage will take many months; however, considerable recovery should occur by the end of 2005.

Source: Energy Information Administration, an agency within the U.S. Energy Department.

The new federal air conditioning efficiency standard will affect heat pump prices

The controversial air conditioning standard known as 13 SEER (Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio) is scheduled to go into effect in January 2006 after a prolonged battle between regulators and the air conditioning industry.

"At this point, all parties have had their day in court," said David Garman, the U.S. Department of Energy's assistant secretary for energy efficiency and renewable energy. "The Department of Energy will enforce the 13 SEER standard." According to the federal agency, the new standard would increase energy efficiency of new air conditioning units by 30 percent.



The current standard is 10 SEER. Industry representatives, including electric utilities, had supported an increase to 12 SEER, or a 20 percent increase in efficiency, which would have promoted energy conservation while remaining economically justifiable for consumers. The new, higher standard will be mean that consumers will need to plan on paying substantially more for new air conditioners.

"The 13 SEER standard does indeed save energy," said John Holt, manager of transportation and fuels for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, "but it may not necessarily save the consumer much money."

Holt said that typical air conditioners that comply with the 13 SEER would be more expensive, about $335 more than today's average price, and that the added expense of a new air conditioner would be repaid in about 10 years.

"A lower standard, such as SEER 12, would have increased energy efficiency, and the payback time would have been sooner," Holt said.

Touchstone Energy supports Rosenwald Schools project

North Carolina's Touchstone Energy cooperatives recently co-sponsored a workshop aimed at locating and preserving the state's Rosenwald Schools. Constructed across the South between the late 1910s and 1932 with seed money from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, these state-of-the-art schools signified tremendous advances in public education for African American students. North Carolina had more than 800 Rosenwald schools, more than any other state.



N.C. Division of Archives and History

Alumni from 1929–39, Panther Branch School, Juniper Level vicinity, Wake County, July 2000.

"With public school integration, the vast majority of these buildings ceased serving as schools," says Claudia Brown of North Carolina's Historic Preservation Office. "But 50 years later they retain significance in their communities—either as memories for the people who attended them if they are no longer standing or as symbols if they are."

For several years, the N. C. State Historic Preservation Office and the N. C. Community Project have been working with volunteers across the state who are identifying and recording North Carolina's Rosenwald schools. The workshop in November was held in Weldon, Halifax County. Halifax County had 46 Rosenwald schools, more than any county in the state.

For more information on Rosenwald schools and the statewide survey, contact the N.C. Historic Preservation Office at 4617 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4617. Phone: (919) 733-6545. Web site: www.hpo.dcr.state.nc.us

Mississippi communities appreciate the dedication and skill of North Carolina crews

When he turned in some pictures of the destruction and reconstruction after Hurricane Katrina, Talmadge Evers looked at some that show line crews from North Carolina cooperatives and he said, "All I heard from people down there is that we have the most professional, courteous men they have ever seen. It made me so proud of these men."

Talmadge Evers is manager of technical training for the Job Training & Safety Department of North Carolina's Association of Electric Cooperatives. He and other safety specialists rotated duty in the hurricane-ravaged country of southern Mississippi in September.

He pointed to a photo of what looks like a thick jungle. Deep in the tangle of trees and brush and wires, you can barely see Jones-Onslow EMC and Piedmont EMC crews in hard hats. "That was a right-of-way. It was unbelievable. But these men worked in there like a drove of hornets. There was no griping. They would drive out there, and when the wheels stopped on the truck these men were off and went straight to work."

Talmadge spoke to some of the local co-op linemen in the Newton, Miss., area north of the coast who told him they had never been through a storm like Katrina. They were especially thankful to work with North Carolina linemen who knew about repairing distribution systems after such a disaster. Residents were, too. "They would come up to us after the power was on in their area and say theirs was not on," Talmadge said. "The men went in and found out their breaker was off."

Their last day in the Newton area, local people put on a huge feast for the visiting crews, including those from Randolph and Pitt & Greene EMC. "It was like a homecoming," Talmadge said. "These people were so nice. The women came and got our clothes and washed and folded them."



Talmadge Evers

The community in the Newton, Miss., area put on a feast for the North Carolina line crews who helped restore their power after Hurricane Katrina.

In spite of the awful odor that surrounded them almost everywhere, especially in the seafood processing areas, the crews kept at it until their work was done. Haywood EMC took a trailer down there with supplies to last 45 days, including a 55-gallon drum with a pump and hosepipe they used as a shower. Talmadge spoke with some of those men who told him they were OK even after two weeks. He said, "They just wanted to be back for b'ar season."

An Alleghany County farm sends

Christmas trees to the White House

By Karen Olson House

Congratulations, Earl, Buddy and Betsy Deal at Smokey Holler Tree Farm. Their busy family farm in Laurel Springs, Alleghany County, was selected to send a towering Christmas tree to be officially displayed at the White House.

The Deals earned the coveted honor by winning the National Christmas Tree Association's (NCTA) contest and becoming 2005 Grand Champions earlier this year.

On Oct. 20, White House chief usher Gary Walters and National Park Service grounds foreman Mike Lawn visited the farm and handpicked a beautiful 18.5-foot-tall Fraser fir to be displayed in the White House's Blue Room. White House staff also selected two other Christmas trees for the White House Oval Office and the Bush family's private residence. Earl, Buddy and Betsy planned to deliver the three trees to the White House in a truck decorated by the North Carolina Christmas Tree Association. They will officially present the Blue Room tree to First Lady Laura Bush on Nov. 28.

Selecting a tree for the White House is the top honor for any Christmas tree grower. "We had tagged this one hoping it would be the one picked," Earl Deal said. "This is a dream come true. I think every Christmas tree grower hopes that they will someday provide a tree to the White House, but it's still hard to believe that it will ever happen to you."

To win the White House honor, the Deals first had to win the North Carolina Christmas Tree Contest sponsored by NCCTA. They won in 2002 and later presented a tree to Governor Mike Easley at a state capitol ceremony in Raleigh.

The Deals, who are members of Blue Ridge Electric, have been growing Christmas trees for 34 years. During that time Smokey Holler has branched out to grow not only trees such as Fraser fir but also white pine, blue spruce, Concolor fir, Norway spruce, and Canaan fir. The farm also does wreaths and roping to utilize low-grade trees.

Their trees are sold wholesale to East Coast and Midwest retailers. The family also operates retail lots in the Raleigh-Durham area and runs a "choose & cut" Christmas tree farm on their property.

Earl first began planting trees in Blowing Rock in 1972 with his cousin and college roommate. As the story goes, they met a gentleman wanting to sell a stand of trees in Laurel Springs. Looking at the trees through a dense fog, they thought the trees looked great and made the deal. But when the sun came out, the trees looked a little worse than they had on the foggy day in the hollow—thus the farm's name "Smokey Holler."

Smokey Holler became a family farm and Earl, Betsy, Buddy, and daughter Meg commuted back and forth to Raleigh on weekends and spent vacations working there. In 1992, Buddy, who helps manage farm operations, became a permanent resident, followed by Earl in 1998 after his retirement from NCSU where he did Extension work, and Betsy in 2000, upon her teaching retirement from the Wake County school system. Meg helps during harvest time and serves as the business's certified public accountant.



North Carolina Christmas Tree Association

Left to right: Gary Walters, White House chief usher; Meg Deal, Betsy Deal, Buddy Deal and Earl Deal show off the 18.5-foot-tall North Carolina Fraser fir chosen for the Blue Room at the White House.

North Carolina ranks second in the U.S. in the production of Christmas trees. The last time a North Carolina tree was displayed at the White House was in 1997.

The National Christmas Tree Association is headquartered in Boone. Its Web site offers guides for locating "choose & cut" Christmas tree farms and growers who offer mail-order trees. To learn more, visit www.ncchristmastrees.com or call (800) 562-8789.



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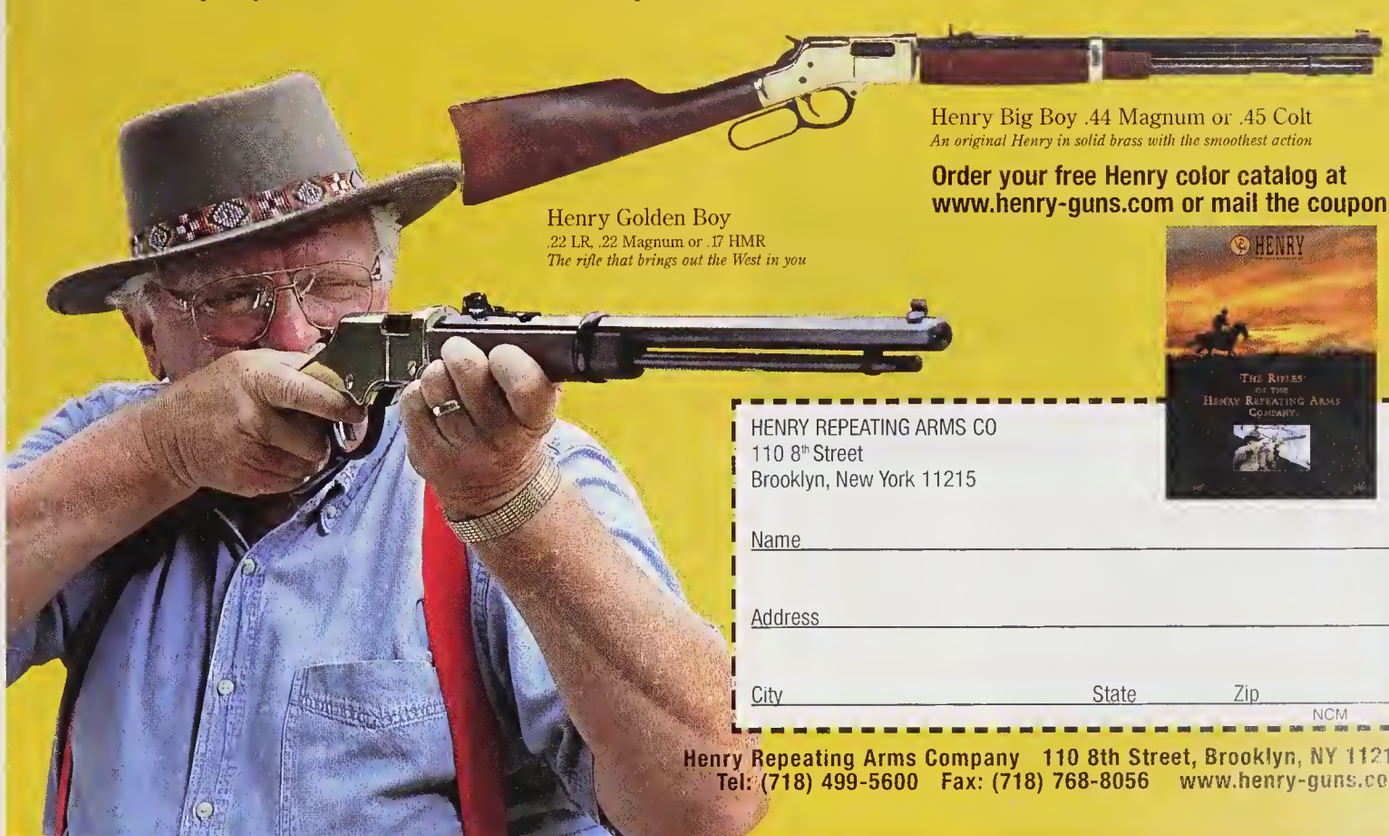
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"Silent Night"



The 2005 Christmas release, "Silent Night," is a holiday print designed by artist Cotton Ketchie. The church depicted in the snowy seasonal setting is the Brevard Chapel United Methodist Church in Denver, N.C. Unframed, signed prints are available for $20. The print measures 10 by 7¼ inches. Also available are boxed Christmas cards. A box of 12 "Silent Night" cards is $12.

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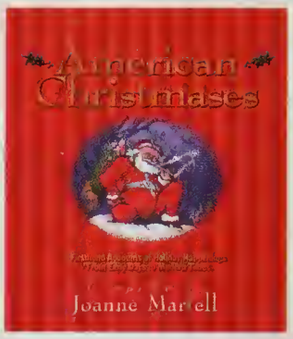
Anders Natural Soap Company



Founded in 1999, the Anders Natural Soap Company features all-natural body care products ranging from soaps to candles. The natural ingredients used to make their items include oatmeal, kelp, essential oils, fragrance oils and only natural colorants. Since they first began business, Anders has added products such as lotion, bath salts, lip balm, aromatherapy candles, shea butter and a variety of "cold process" soaps. Anders Natural Soap Company products are sold online and at The Raleigh Farmers Market in the Market Shoppes (Tuesday-Sunday) and at the N.C. State Fairgrounds in Raleigh inside building # 1 (Saturday and Sunday).

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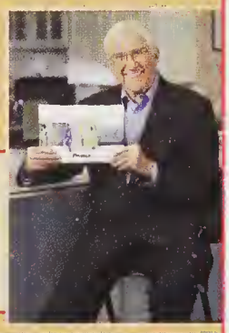
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your favorite livestock
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From Kelli Tschillier Friday, Dallas

From Kelli Tschillier Friday, Dallas

... When visiting relatives in northern states you're asked where you got your accent and you tell them you brought it with you in a Y'all Haul.

... You know that canned green beans don't come in an aluminum can at MaMaw's.

... You cross the state line to buy your shoes at The Jesus Store.

... You have pictures of your favorite livestock, both here and gone, in your family albums.

... Your husband's tractor is parked in the yard beside your car.

... Your husband has two tractors, two old Army jeeps and a '68 Pontiac in the barn as "projects."

... You had to take two cases of Sun-Drop with you to Myrtle Beach because once you got past Pageland you couldn't find it anywhere.

... Your city relatives are shocked that you actually want that old blacksnake in your barn.

... Your relatives include MaMaw, PaPaw, MeeMaw, PeePaw, Great Maw and Poppy.

... Your PaPaw called you "Snickelfritz","Pookanellie" or "Pickletoes," and you now address your kids likewise.

... Your MaMaw had the right to whoop you like you were her own.

From Janice Jenkins, Wallace

... You take Sundrop on vacation with you because you can't get it anywhere else.

... You went trick-or-treating riding on the tailgate of a station wagon.

From Avery Whitley, Stanly County

... You didn't wear shoes unless it was time to go to church or back to school.

... You know exactly what a mud pie tastes like.

... The local store owner adds up the prices on the back of a paper bag.

... You sit on the front porch of your grandma's house in the dark, singing gospel hymns until bedtime.

From Hannah Smith, Surry-Yadkin EMC

... You call a dog a sooner.

... You eat hoecake bread and pinto beans when it's snowing outside.

... You love everybody no matter what color they are.

... There are no more parking spots so you drive your John Deere tractor to school and park it on the football field.

... Your favorite song is "She Thinks My Tractor's Sexy" by Kenny Chesney.

... Your little brother has every John Deere toy tractor that Tractor Supply has ever carried.

From Angela Lawson, Greensboro

... The days of the week are Sundee, Mondee, Tuesdee, Wensdee, Thursdee, Fridee, and Saturdee.

... You know what catty-wonkered means.

... North Carolina town names ending in "ville" are pronounced "vuhl."

... You used a kiddie pool for snow sledding.

From Vickie Cruthis, Trinity

... You know what the leak of a house is. (You put buckets under the leak of the house to catch rainwater runoff from the roof for watering household flowers and plants.)

... You know what "hither and yon" means. (Mama would piece quilts, and she was very careful that the corners of her quilt squares would meet. She would look at other people's work and critique it by saying something like, "Look at that. Her squares are going all hither and yon.")

From Sammy Bailey, Wingate

... Your mother would fuss if you stood with the frigidairy open.

... You and your father made poppers for your bicycle spokes out of paper and clothespins.

... When plowing the garden, you never dig up the volunteer tomatoes.

From Dawn Howell, Ronda

... You tie your dogs to a stump or the pillar of the house.

... You don't need a deer stand in the woods because they come right into your own yard.

... You'd rather go on a wagon train than to the family reunion.

... Your first date was at a tractor pull.

... You got married in a barn.

From Delana Shinault

... You have a row of empty milk jugs in your garden in the spring.

... You made mud pies in pop bottle lids.

... You used pokeberries to write your name on the side of the barn, then said you didn't.

... You and your cousins sat on the gas tank at the barn and played horsey all afternoon.

From Betty Duncan, Winston-Salem

... You picked half-runner green beans 'til the snakes ran you out of the patch.

... You fried fat back from momma hog and made milk gravy.

... When you told your momma your bones hurt she said you had growing pains.

From Gary W. McLean, Creedmoor

... Anytime you didn't feel 100 percent, your parents would give you a dose or two of Fletcher's Castoria or Epsom's Salt, claiming you needed to be "cleaned out."

... During the one-mile walk to the country store, you could pick up enough returnable Coke and Pepsi bottles to buy yourself a huge bag of penny candy.

... The Meadow Gold milkman would bring you plain milk and a couple quarts of chocolate milk, and then on Saturday mornings, maybe you'd get ice cream.

... You remember lining up on the Baptist church steps before proceeding behind the United States flag and the Christian flag into the church during Vacation Bible School.

... The only alarm clock that you needed to get up, get dressed and be at the tobacco fields was Mr. Williams driving his Farmall tractor by your house.

... There wasn't any air conditioning and you had a whole-house window fan.

... You cleaned the exterior of your house every year by manually washing it with Clorox bleach, water, a scrub brush and rubber gloves.

... Your brother got a bad case of poison oak and your mother boiled polk root in a tea-like mixture then rubbed him down with it while you're thinking it would set him afire.

From Marie Wall Harris, Yadkinville

... You know that the little leg of a chicken is really part of the wing.

... You say "ought" when something hurts.

... You say "aught" instead of zero.

... You take a stick from a black gum tree, chew the end to resemble a brush and dip snuff with it.

... As a child you made fake snuff using cocoa and sugar.

... You know that you "gravel" under potato vines for the spuds.

... You say "I'm give out" when you have worked hard and need to rest.

... You say that you will have something done in a skip and a hop.

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The time when Daddy, the electrician, hung our Christmas lights

and other stories of holiday mishaps

Thanks to everyone who sent stories about memorable holiday moments. You can see more on our Web site. Next month we'll publish your stories of "How I Improved My Health." [Deadline was Nov. 15.] See more themes and rules for our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series on page 18.

It wasn't fog

When I was 7 years old, my father announced that he would decorate the beautiful cedar tree in our front yard for Christmas. He was an electrician, and we figured if he could wire buildings with ease he certainly could decorate a tree.

So off the family went to Lowe's, where we stocked up on boxes and boxes of colorful Christmas lights. When we got home that night it took hours to wrap the strands of lights around that tree. Finally it was complete! My father hadn't bothered to read the directions, and since he was an electrician we figured he didn't need to.

When he plugged them in, all 15 strands of lights twinkled with color. We stood there admiring the tree, and Daddy mentioned how beautiful it looked as the fog came off our pond. It was at this moment that I belted out, "Daddy! That isn't fog! The tree's on fire!"

Evidently 15 strands of lights are a few too many lights to connect together. You would think an electrician would have realized this, but I guess he got a little swept up in the holiday spirit.

I've always thought my father hung the moon. I still believe that, but now I know he can't hang Christmas lights.

Mary Wester, Durham | Wake Electric

The trip to the mountains

It was going to be the great escape: no work, no cooking or cleaning, no spending the night with relatives. We were headed to the mountains for Thanksgiving vacation.

Our first destination—Santa Land. CLOSED. No problem. There was still fun to be had.

We made it to our hotel with the indoor swimming pool, only to find out that it was not heated.

The next morning, we set out on foot to explore some sites. Dad ended up carrying Jessie because her boots didn't fit, and I carried Nicole because she was overtired.

The Ripley's Aquarium was amazing; I just hope that Nicole's temper tantrums didn't disturb the other visitors.

As we headed back to the hotel, we couldn't wait to sit in the restaurant and enjoy the Thanksgiving feast. Apparently, it was straight from a can.

We did manage to have some fun. The Black Bear Jamboree and the Polar Express were a hoot. But we missed Thanksgiving with the family and we could have done without the typical traveling-with-children woes that end with someone vomiting in the back seat on the ride home.

My advice: STAY HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

Cathy Busam, Youngsville | Wake Electric

The Belk-Tyler man

In the early 1960s, we were farmers and lived up a lane across the field from my husband's parents. We had four children and no room to hide Santa. The big barn behind their grandparents' home seemed like an ideal place. There was no reason for the children to go into the barn. We felt secure because we had large, thick bags of lespedeza seeds stacked to the ceiling and in rows. We talked with Santa and made a deal to put the larger items between the rows of seed and to just pull out a bag here and there to make sure nothing was visible if anyone did decide to peek around in the barn.

We were on a tight budget, and every year I would collect the ears of corn left across the ends and along the rows and sell them. We used this money to supplement Santa's budget. As I look back, I received as much for that corn as today's farmers receive per bushel.

This particular year one of the boys wanted his first 26-inch bike. Our oldest daughter wanted what was called a train case—now we just call it the smallest piece of luggage in a set—with a mirror in the lid, and it had to be Samsonite and red. My husband had been deer hunting (those days you really had to hunt deer). He came home just before dark and whispered that he was going to retrieve Santa and park the pickup somewhere away from the house.

When he came back he had a different look on his face. I followed him into the kitchen, and he said that someone had stolen the bike and the train case. Everything else was safe. It was almost 6 p.m., and the stores all closed at 6. Thankfully the party line was not in use, and I looked up and called Belk-Tyler's. A stock man answered, and I explained our dilemma that the only things our children really wanted were gone. He was so understanding and said the store would be closed, but we could go to the back door. He said he had a red 26-inch boy's bike and also a train case he believed was red also. He would wait for me.

I don't remember what the replacements cost, but we will always remember the kindness of a man (whose name is now forgotten) and his smiling face as the gentleman who saved Christmas. He went out of his way to turn a family's despair into a joyous Christmas morning. We never knew who took the gifts, but we will always remember the kindness of the one who replaced them. Merry Christmas.

Doris Godfrey, Hertford / Albemarle EMC

No invitation needed

One Christmas several years ago, we were living in a small trailer. There were five of us girls and Mom and Dad and Grandma were there, too. We were up on Christmas morning trying to get a nice breakfast going when the power went off due to a sliced wire in our backyard. Now what?

Well, our good friends' place was down the road from us. They weren't at home, but we knew they wouldn't mind if we used their house. So we took our half-cooked breakfast to their house, finished cooking it, and had a jolly time in spite of ourselves.

Holly Carver, Rutherfordton / Rutherford EMC

Monty and the Christmas tree

Our son Monty's fifth Christmas was a magical time for him. Eyes bright with excitement, he participated in each holiday activity with energy and enthusiasm. But the thing that fascinated him the most was decorating the Christmas tree.

A few days before Christmas that year I was busy in the kitchen when I heard a loud crash. Running to the living room, to my horror, I saw our beautiful tree on the floor, ornaments broken, lights jumbled and water everywhere. I also saw one very chagrined little boy. After cleaning up the mess, I patiently explained to Monty that he could look at the tree as much as he wanted, but he was not to touch it anymore. Back I went to my baking, sure that the problem had been solved.

Much too soon I heard another crash. Returning to the living room, I saw the same scene as before: little boy, big mess. Once again, I fixed the tree, which was beginning to look a bit ragged, and cleaned up the mess. With narrowed eyes and a steely voice, I informed Monty in no uncertain terms that he was to leave the tree completely alone and find something else to play with.

All was calm, and peace was on earth—or at least in our household—and my heart was filled with the joy of the season. I had almost finished my baking when once again I heard that now familiar crash. When I got to the living room this time, there was the tree on the floor, but no boy. Finally I noticed two little feet sticking out from under a branch. Fuming, I jerked the tree up and glared down at my son, who looked up at me, smiled, and said, "I didn't hurt myself."

Once again I cleaned up the debris and set our tree upright. It looked awful, but stayed in place from then on, and we had a joyful, happy and memorable Christmas.

Peggy Fuller, Scaly Mountain / Haywood EMC

The angels in Murphy

When my husband and I purchased a secluded doublewide home near Murphy around the holidays we decided to spend our first night in our new home on Christmas Eve. What a night this was!

About midnight, we noticed the house starting to cool off. We had run out of propane at one of the coldest periods of the season and the most inconvenient time of year. We had no phone, nor did we know anyone in the area. Being desperate, we finally bundled our cat up and drove to the nearest neighbor's home and asked to use their phone. Lucky for us, they were still awake and trusted us.

After getting no response from the gas company, our neighbor said she knew someone who might be able to help us find a supplemental gas tank. She called this "angel," and he came out in the cold and very late hour (or very early, depending how you look at it) and hooked up a small propane tank. He said it would get us through a couple of days.

We have been forever grateful to these caring people for helping us on our first night in our new home. Not only did we learn to always check the propane tank in winter, but also that there really is a Santa Claus or two living in Murphy, N.C.

Robert and Cheryl Thomas, Murphy / Blue Ridge Mountain EMC

The frozen presents

When you are 4 years old, Christmas is one of the best times of the year. One Christmas my son wanted a soccer net, a play workbench, a wagon and almost anything else you could think of. At my house, Santa usually gets my son what he wants, and that year was no different.

We had stored the presents at my parents' house so he would not find them. After having dinner with my parents, my husband loaded the truck with the presents to take home. But my son would not go to sleep. So we just put the presents on the front porch so it would be easier to get them inside as my son slept.

We, too, fell asleep, and as we did, freezing rain and sleet began to fall. This froze all his toys to the porch. We had to get the hair dryer and the kerosene heater to get the toys unfrozen. I hope my son knows just how much Santa loves him.

Shelley Goff, Gray's Creek / South River EMC

Next year's Christmas gifts

Three Christmases ago my son and his wife were hosting their first family Christmas dinner. There were 17 in attendance. I had asked my husband's sister if she would bring 14 salad plates from her Christmas china to use for dessert. (The three children ate from the everyday plates.) My sister-in-law brought the plates, and we set the desserts on a separate table in the den.

After the dessert, the plates were cleared away, washed and placed on the antique table in the den for my sister-in-law to pack up. She picked up the first plate and the table leg suddenly collapsed! Seven of the 14 plates broke. I was appalled. I felt so responsible since I was the one who had asked her to bring them.

My sister-in-law was completely nonplussed. She said she rarely used the plates, and besides, everyone would know what they would get for Christmas gifts the next year.

The following Christmas all the ladies and the one little girl got beautiful bracelets and necklaces made from the broken plates! Everyone who comments on our beautiful jewelry is entertained by the story behind it.

Martha Blount, Rocky Mount

The stove and the sink

It was Christmas Eve 1980, and we had ordered our daughter Robyn a stove and sink set. She wanted it so badly. That night when Robyn and her brother David were sleeping, we took the monstrosity out of the box, which contained painted, corrugated cardboard, a plastic sink, knobs and a hundred screws—with assembly directions in Spanish.

My husband and I worked on that set until 3 a.m. when he finally gave up and went to bed. I folded, screwed, cussed and prayed until I got what I could together. Then I gave up and went to bed.

A couple of hours later I awoke to excited shrieks and laughter from the living room. When I walked in I started laughing, too. The major appliance we had solemnly purchased was wrong-side-out on one side. The knobs were in the floor, and the new pots and pans that Robyn was putting on it were sliding off as fast as she put them on since it was leaning like the tower of Pisa.

Teresa Erby, Rockingham / Pee Dee EMC

Holiday road kill

To understand this story, you first need to know that my grandfather is a gadget freak and my dad loves to buy things that are on sale. When the two of them went together to a huge tool show while we were visiting my grandparents for Thanksgiving, we knew there was bound to be trouble. Everything seemed fine when they returned with nothing more than a car-top luggage carrier that they had bought for a very low price.

On the morning of my family's return home, my dad packed in the new luggage carrier most of our suitcases and a lot of the Christmas presents my mom had bought the day before. After we got a few hours down the road, my mom noticed that one of the carrier straps was no longer connected and was flapping in the wind. Everything else seemed secure so we didn't stop. Several miles later, a couple of cars honked as they passed us on the Interstate. Fearing that his recent investment was not living up to its "rip-stop" guarantee, my dad pulled the car over to investigate. Much to the dismay of my siblings and myself, my dad informed us that all but a lonely few of our gifts were most likely scattered all along the Interstate.

Being the money-saving family that we are, my parents were determined to at least look for our lost presents. As we kids covered our eyes, my parents drove back and walked along the highway until they found every single one of them. On Christmas Day, as we opened those gifts, we remembered the day of the holiday road kill.

Hannah Love, Matthews / Butler High School

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Send us your pictures and stories about the best picnic place in North Carolina.
Deadline: Feb. 15

May 2006 **"The Ugliest Lamp I Ever Saw"** Send us the pictures.
Deadline: March 15

The Rules

1. Approximately 200 words or less.
2. One entry per household per month.
3. Photos are welcome. Digital photos must be 300 dpi and actual size.
4. E-mailed or typed, if possible. Otherwise, make it legible.
5. Include your name, electric co-op, mailing address and phone number.
6. If you want your entry returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. (We will not return others.)
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Lineman's Chrismas Eve

By Ray Wyatt

'Twas the night before Christmas
And all through the house
Not a creature was stirring
'Cause the power was out.

How could this happen?
How could it be?
The house is all dark,
Even lights on the tree.

The lineman's asleep
All cozy and warm,
His power apparently
Spared by the storm.

Deep into slumber
But soon to awake,
'Cause a tree on the line
Has caused it to break.

The calls swamp the office.
"MY POWER IS OUT!
Get them here quickly,
'Cause I carry clout."

The dispatcher calls
With a hint of despair
To tell the lineman
The need for repair.

In three or four hours
The trouble is found:
The road didn't pass
Where the tree went down.

Out in the snow
They carry their tools
And fix the fault
As they learned in the schools.

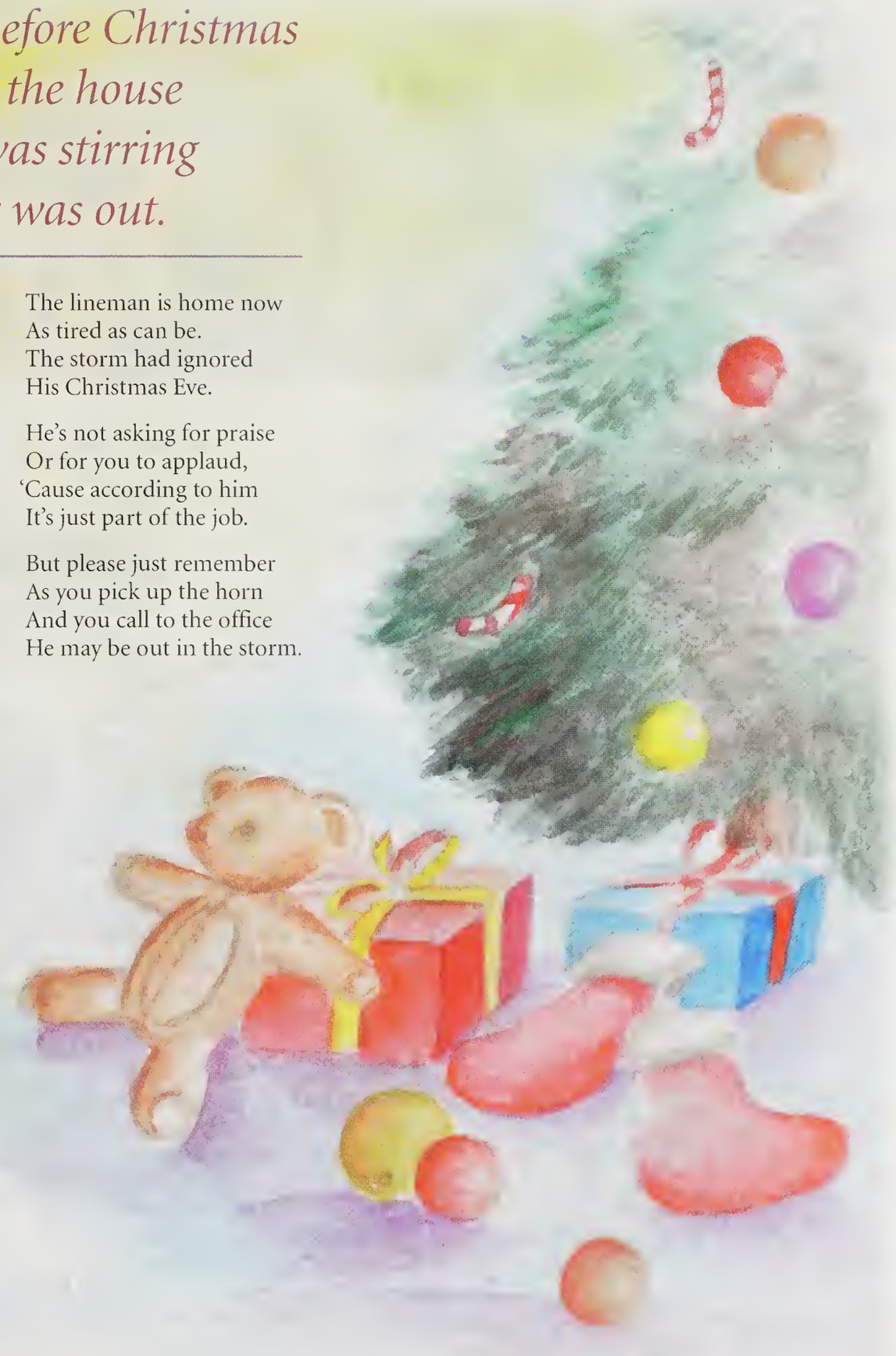
They leave the scene
and drive back in the dawn.
The line is now clear
And the power is on.

And now it's the morning
The kids shout with glee,
Their eyes shining bright
As the lights on the tree.

The lineman is home now
As tired as can be.
The storm had ignored
His Christmas Eve.

He's not asking for praise
Or for you to applaud,
'Cause according to him
It's just part of the job.

But please just remember
As you pick up the horn
And you call to the office
He may be out in the storm.



Ray Wyatt has been employed by Haywood Electric Membership Corporation in Waynesville for 33 years. He is a journeyman lineman.



THE PUBLIC LIFE of bees

By Jim Mize

Scandalous books about the private lives of bees have dominated the bestseller lists of late. Since I never read them, I can hardly dispute or verify what is rumored to go on amongst bees in private. I will tell you, however, that the public lives of bees are steamy enough.

Female Dominance

Bee society, unsurprisingly, is dominated by women. They run the beehive and do all the work. At least half the readers of Carolina Country magazine are unsurprised by this.

The head female bee, known appropriately as the queen, is the largest bee in the hive, though all the male bees know better than to point this out. None of the males ever graduate to king, likely due to a lack of ambition.

The queen also rules the roost with an iron wing. The workers, which are infertile females, build the hive, search for nectar, feed the young, and vacuum. Well, maybe not vacuum, but literally everything else. The male bees, known as drones, just mate with the queen and die. Males lack the ability to sting; they buzz a lot, and are completely harmless, although their incessant buzzing probably indicates they talk a good game with their buddies.

To prove just how useless male bees are, if food becomes scarce in the fall, the females kick them out and let them starve, unless the queen is around to stick up for them. Coincidentally, this occurs about the same time as football season.

The queen bee's control of the hive comes not surprisingly from the use of hormones. One hormone is used to attract drones and another is used to keep other females infertile. With all these hormones and females in one hive, it makes sense that the males would be completely harmless, lack a sting, and get thrown out of the hive to starve.

Doing the Bee Boogie

Since the hives are composed mostly of women, it should also come as no surprise that they like to dance. In fact, Karl von Frisch won a Nobel Prize in 1973 by figuring out the language of bee dancing. (Stay tuned…this could be the scandalous part). He determined that bees know two dances, neither of which are the Shag.

In the first dance, worker bees dance in a circle indicating the source of nectar they have found. In the second dance, they indicate the distance to the nectar

With all these hormones and females in one hive, it makes sense that the males would be

completely harmless, lack a sting, and get thrown out of the hive to starve.

by wagging their tails. In hindsight, this tail-wagging dance may have inspired the invention of the Shag.

To aid their studies of bee dancing, scientists invented a robotic bee that could perform these dances. Sometimes, just for kicks, the scientists would get the robotic bee to send all the others in the wrong direction, proving only that scientists are easy to amuse.

The male bees, on the other hand, communicate mostly by sounds. Probably, this is due to their being lousy dancers.

Makin' Honey but Not Biscuits

"Busy as a bee" is a phrase well justified, as the typical worker will visit and pollinate 10,000 flowers in a single day. Literally, they live on fast food.

All this activity targets one activity: making honey. Honey-making is a complex process, at least to me.

From what I can tell, it begins when a bee absorbs nectar into a honey sac, which works something like a stomach. On the trip back to the hive, some of the nectar is eliminated, and you can probably guess how.

The nectar is then enriched by the bee glands and unloaded back at the hive, and once again, I'll let you envision this part of the process. Other bees do something disgusting to process it, and then flap frantically to evaporate more water. This distilling goes on for a while and when the water content drops to 17-20 percent, the revenuers show up. Just kidding, but the honey is "ripe" at that point.

Bees produce honey with the hope of getting to eat it all winter. This is especially true of the drones, who run the risk of getting the boot.

The typical bee colony consists of 50,000-60,000 workers and who knows how many slackers. They produce on average 50 pounds of honey and no biscuits.

Another reason they need all this honey is that they do not hibernate. Instead, they pass the winter eating and huddling to keep warm, probably around tiny potbelly stoves.

Steer Clear of Swarms

One of the scariest sights you will ever see, excluding having one of your buddies back your trailer down a boat ramp, is a swarm of honeybees. The sight of 30,000 bees flying in a tight cloud is enough to cause kids to give up late-night horror films.

Typically, a swarm will settle on a tree limb or bush. They may stay here until an appropriate nest or cavity can be found. This is one good reason to always close your mailbox, at least if you want the mailman ever to return.

Bees swarm due to overcrowding and other factors. Considering that all the bees that matter are women, it could have been as simple as something one of them said or a dispute over wall colors. On this point, the robotic bee is not talking. But undoubtedly, the male bees had no idea why the women were mad anyway.

Most swarms occur in the spring or early summer. Experts recommend that if you see a swarm, either call a beekeeper or hive it yourself. So my advice is to call a beekeeper. Even though bees out for a jaunt tend to be in a good mood, remember there are 30,000 of them and they are mostly women.

With all the honey-making and tail-wagging going on, it's no wonder bees lead such scandalous lives. I'd say more, but you never know exactly which wisecrack will get you kicked out of the hive.

Jim Mize lives in Simpsonville, S.C. He has collected the best of his outdoor humor in an award-winning book titled, "The Winter of Our Discount Tent." Copies are available for $18.95 plus shipping and handling by calling (800) 768-2500.



Keep your holidays worry-free with these safety tips



Whether you wrap your house with hundreds of lights and put a life-size St.Nick and reindeer on your roof, or just grace your tree with a few simple strings of twinkling lights, holiday decorations are a great way to celebrate the joys of the season with friends and family.

But along with good cheer, holiday decorations can bring danger. According to the U.S.Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), hospital emergency rooms treat around 12,500 people annually for cuts, falls and shocks related to holiday lights, decorations and Christmas trees. Most of these injuries could be avoided by taking proper precautions. Here are some helpful tips from the Leviton Institute to help keep your holiday safe:

- Carefully inspect all holiday lights and decorations before you install them. Any wires that are frayed, excessively kinked, show visible gaps in insulation or bare spots, or have cracked or broken sockets should be replaced immediately. Make sure all lights and extension cords are UL rated for safety.
- Don't link more than three strands of lights together unless the instructions specifically say that it's safe to do so. Connect light strands together first, then plug them into the extension cord and plug the extension into the outlet.
- Don't overload outlets or extensions with too many lights or decorations. It could create a shock hazard, or even start a fire. Problem signs indicating an overload include flickering lights, blown fuses or tripped circuit breakers, or outlets or switches that feel warm to the touch. If this occurs, be sure to take corrective action immediately.
- Never place electric lights on a metallic Christmas tree. And when fastening lights to walls, don't use regular metal staples or nails; they could easily cut through the insulation and short out the wires. Use only insulated staples or hooks specially made for the purpose.
- Make sure when installing lights outside that they are rated for outdoor use and plugged into a receptacle equipped with a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI), preferably one with a weatherproof cover. If no GFCI receptacles are available, you should use a GFCI-equipped extension cord set, which is inexpensive (typically around $25 or less), and widely available. Just be sure to plug the GFCI-equipped extension cord into the receptacle first, and then plug in the lights and decorations into the extension cord.
- Always unplug lights when away from home or when sleeping.
- Be aware that young children are attracted to lights and shiny decorations. To prevent them from pulling on them or worse, putting them in their mouths, make sure all lights and ornaments are out of reach of children.
- Avoid using lit candles whenever possible, and never use them on a Christmas tree.
- Keep your tree well-watered; a wet tree is much less likely be ignited by a stray spark flame than a dry one.

Make sure your pets have a safe holiday, too

Here's a checklist with a few simple precautions to protect your cats or dogs from harm during holiday festivities.

- Try to route electric cords away from where your pets can reach them. Puppies and kittens love to chew on things, including wires; they can easily gnaw through insulation and receive a painful shock or be electrocuted. But never run cords under carpets; walking on them could damage the insulation and cause a fire. Check your local pet store for chew-proof plastic sleeves that you can wrap around wires, or bitter-tasting liquids that you can apply to discourage your pet from nibbling on something dangerous.
- Keep tinsel, decorations, and the hooks for hanging them, out of reach of inquisitive pets. If you're wondering what may tempt a pet, you might find it helpful to get on your hands and knees and view the world from their perspective.
- Cover the water in your tree stand which can make your pet sick if they drink it. Likewise, certain holiday plants like poinsettias, mistletoe berries, holly, and amaryllis, if ingested, may also poison your pet.
- Prevent your dog or cat from knocking over your tree by attaching the tree to the ceiling or wall with fishing line.
- Mount indoor lights high enough to prevent pets from becoming entangled in them.



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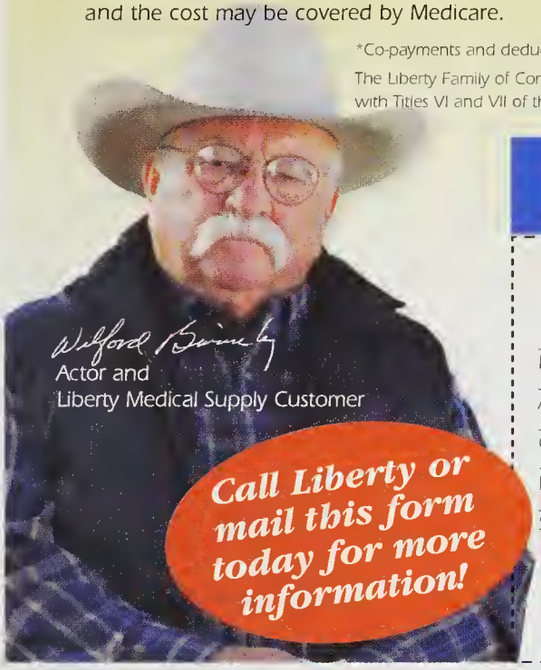
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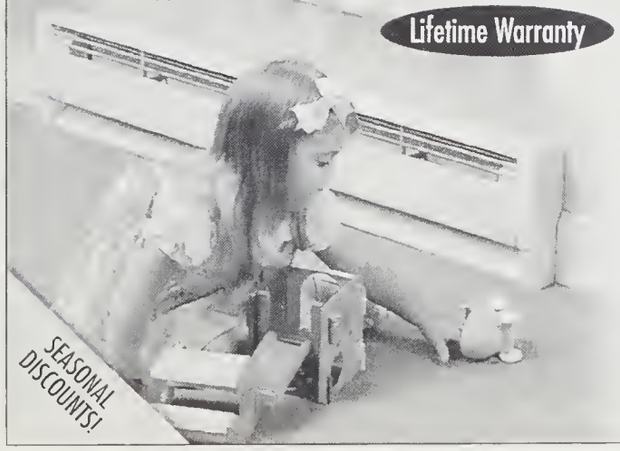
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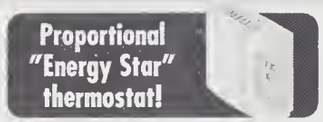
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December Events



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MOUNTAINS

"Christmas at the Farm"
Dec. 3, Hendersonville
(828) 891-6585
www.historicjohnsonfarm.org

Annual Holiday Concert
Dec. 4, West Jefferson
(336) 846-2787
www.ashecountyarts.org

Blue Ridge Concert Series
Dec. 9, West Jefferson
(336) 846-2787
www.ashecountyarts.org

Holiday Tour of Historic Inns
Dec. 11, Hendersonville
(828) 697-3088

PIEDMONT

Fearrington for the Holidays
Through Dec. 26, Pittsboro
(919) 542-2121
http://fearringtonvillage.com

"A Homeschool Christmas"
Dec. 2, Huntersville
(704) 875-2312
www.lattaplantation.org

"Meet Father Christmas"
Dec. 3, Gastonia
(704) 866-6900
www.schielemuseum.org

Old-Time Christmas
Dec. 3, Youngsville
(919) 556-5073

The McKee Family Humphammer
Dec. 3, Mineral Springs
(803) 329-3833

"The Legacy of Elvis"
Dec. 3, Mint Hill
(704) 545-6618

Annual Christmas on the Square
Dec. 3, Rockingham
(910) 997-3996

Welcome December
Dec. 3, Lexington
(336) 248-5929

Chatham County Studio Tour
Dec. 3–4, Pittsboro
(919) 542-0394
www.chathamarts.org/studiotour.htm

Backcountry Christmas
Dec. 4, Statesville
(704) 873-4734
www.iredellmuseums.org

Annual Christmas Craft Show
Dec. 4, Hillsborough
(919) 732-8714

Holiday Jubilee 2005
Dec. 4, Fayetteville
(910) 486-1330

Annual Christmas Candlelight
Dec. 4, Lexington
(336) 248-5929

Christmas Candlelight Tour
Dec. 4, Historic Hillsborough
(919) 732-8156

Christmas Craft Show
Dec. 4, Hillsborough
(919) 732-8714

Jaycees Christmas Parade
Dec. 5, Lexington
(336) 248-5929

Scrooge Dinner Show
Dec. 9, Oakboro
(704) 485-3649
www.oakboromusichall.com

Santa Train
Dec 9–11, Durham
(919) 220-5429
www.ncmls.org

"Celebrate with Wildlife"
Dec. 10, Gastonia
(704) 866-6900
www.schielemuseum.org

Southern Junction
Dec. 10, Mineral Springs
(803) 329-3833

Holiday House Tour
Dec. 10–11, Chapel Hill
(919) 942-7818

Historic Rosedale Christmas
Dec. 10–11, Charlotte
(704) 335-0325
www.historicrosedale.org

Christmas at Tyro Plantation
Dec. 10–11, Tyro
(336) 249-9676
www.tyronc.com

Chatham County Studio Tour
Dec. 10–11, Pittsboro
(919) 542-0394
www.chathamarts.org/studiotour.htm

Alamance Battleground Christmas
Dec. 11, Burlington
(336) 227-4785

"A Viennese Christmas"
Dec. 13, Yanceyville
(336) 694-4591

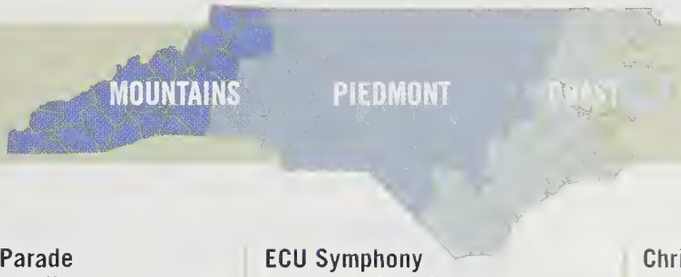
B.E. Taylor Christmas
Dec. 13, Winston-Salem
(336) 721-1945
www.ncarts.edu/stevens_center

Santa Train
Dec 16–18, Durham
(919) 220-5429
www.ncmls.org

"A Christmas Memory"
Dec. 16–18, Winston-Salem
(888) 663-1149
www.reynoldahouse.org

Nutcracker Suite on Ice
Dec. 17, Hillsborough
(919) 644-0339

Pine Ridge Tradition
The Helms Family
Dec. 17, Mineral Springs
(803) 329-3833



Dip Your Own Candle
Dec. 17–18, High Point
(336) 885-1859
www.highpointmuseum.org

COAST

Holiday Show
Dec. 1–11, Morehead City
(252) 729-9311

Festival of Trees
Dec. 1–23, Greenville
(252) 328-9332

Christmas Parade
Dec. 2, Creswell
(252) 797-4852
www.visitwashingtoncountync.com

Christmas at Twilight
Dec. 2, Wallace
(910) 285-4044
www.wallacechamber.com

Core Sound Waterfowl Weekend
Dec. 2–4, Harkers Island
(252) 728-1500
www.coresound.com

ECU Symphony
Dec. 3, Oriental
(252) 249-3362
www.pamlicomusic.org

Christmas Flotilla
Dec. 3, Morehead City
(252) 726-8148

Cookie Walk
Dec. 3, New Bern
(252) 636-0202

Albemarle Chorale in Concert
Dec. 3, Edenton
(252) 482-5064

Christmas Parade
Dec. 3, Roper
(252) 793-5532

Core Sound Decoy Festival
Dec. 3–4, Harkers Island
(252) 838-8818

Albemarle Chorale in Concert
Dec. 4, Elizabeth City
(252) 482-5064

Rehoboth Love Feast
Dec. 4, East of Roper
(252) 793-3248
jmayo@washconc.org

Candlelight Christmas
Dec. 8–9, Murfreesboro
(252) 398-5922
www.murfreesboronc.com

Caroling on the Green
Dec. 9, Edenton
(252) 482-2637

Carolina Christmas Walk
Dec. 10, Beaufort
(252) 728-5225
www.beauforthistoricsite.org

Christmas Parade
Dec. 10, Edenton
(800) 775-0111

Christmas Parade
Dec. 10, Wallace
(910) 285-4044
www.wallacechamber.com

Mid County Christmas Parade
Dec. 11, Mid County
(252) 793-9465

Christmas in the Barn
Dec. 17–18, Scotland Neck
(252) 826-5395

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www.hickorymuseumofart.org

Music and Tree Fest
Through Dec. 29, West Jefferson, Ashe Arts Center
(336) 846-2787
www.ashecountyarts.org

John Mode Photography
Through Jan. 8, Hickory
Hickory Museum of Art
(828) 327-8576
www.hickorymuseumofart.org

Catawba Clay: Two Centuries of Tradition
Through 2006, Hickory
Hickory Museum of Art
(828) 327-8576
www.hickorymuseumofart.org

"Sights and Sounds of Christmas"
Through Jan. 2006, Lenoir
Caldwell Heritage Museum
(828) 758-4004

"Faces and Figures in Folk Art"
Through March 2006, Hickory, Hickory Museum of Art, (828) 327-8576
www.hickorymuseumofart.org

PIEDMONT

"Home for the Holidays"
Through Dec. 15, Statesville
Iredell Museums
(704) 873-4734
www.iredellmuseums.org

Don Reitz Ceramics
Through Dec. 31, Charlotte
Mint Museum of Art
(704) 337-2000
www.mintmuseum.org

"Season of Light"
Saturdays and Sundays
Dec. 3–Jan. 1, Gastonia
James H. Lynn Planetarium
(704) 866-6900
www.schielemuseum.org

Twelve Days of Christmas
Dec. 4–Jan. 6, Chapel Hill
(800) 962-8519

"Make it Move"
Through Jan. 7, Oxford
Granville County Historical Society Museum
(919) 693-9706
www.oxfordnc.org/museum.html

"Strange Matters"
Through Jan. 8, Durham
N.C. Museum of Life and Science
(919) 220-5429
www.ncmls.org

"Renaissance to Rococo"
Through Jan. 15, Charlotte
Mint Museum of Art
(704) 337-2000
www.mintmuseum.org

"Winter in the Piedmont"
Through Feb. 19, Gastonia
Schiele Museum
(704) 866-6900
www.schielemuseum.org

"The Potter's Eye"
Through March 19, Raleigh
The N.C. Museum of Art
(919) 839-6262
http://ncartmuseum.org

COAST

"Pocosin Arts: The First Ten Years"
Through Dec. 30, Manteo
The Art Gallery
(252) 475-1500
www.roanokeisland.com

Local Artisans Guild Crafts
Through Dec. 31, Snow Hill
Greene County Museums
(252) 747-1999

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For March: January 25

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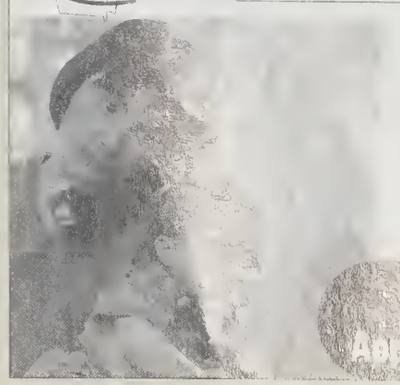
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If you were to punch in the number above on your telephone key pad you would spell out the name of a North Carolina county.

LIGHT VERSE

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder..."
doesn't say of whom.
Some folks make my outlook brighten
when they leave the room.

—*Cy Nical*

For answers, please turn to page 28.

MATH WIRDZ

There is an old saying that you cannot compare apples to oranges. In the interest of science, we've done so anyway, proving that one orange is worth exactly three apples. Letters have been substituted for digits in this division puzzle. Can you replace the digits?

```
          A P P L E
      ┌──────────
D   3 │ O R A N G E
      O L
      ─────
        O A
        O P
        ─────
          O N
          O P
          ─────
            U G
            U G
            ─────
                E
                E
                ─
```

Here is the the solution to last month's "SCRAMBLED #8."

D	M	S	E	B	L	A	C	R
R	B	A	M	D	C	S	E	L
E	C	L	S	A	R	B	D	M
L	D	E	C	R	A	M	B	S
S	A	C	B	E	M	R	L	D
B	R	M	D	L	S	C	A	E
C	L	R	A	M	D	E	S	B
M	S	B	L	C	E	D	R	A
A	E	D	R	S	B	L	M	C

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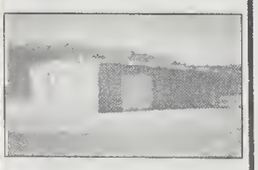
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Getting To Know...



Curtis L. Brown

Born: March 11, 1956, in Elizabethtown (Bladen County)

Known for: NASA Astronaut

Accomplishments: Curtis Brown graduated from East Bladen High School in Elizabethtown in 1974. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1978. He has logged more than 6,000 hours of flight time in jet aircraft and served as an instructor and test pilot. Selected as an astronaut candidate by NASA in 1987, Brown completed a one-year training and evaluation program in 1988. A veteran of six space flights, his technical assignment included upgrading the Shuttle Mission Simulator, developing the Flight Data File and working as a lead spacecraft communicator. His special honors include receiving the Defense Superior Service Medal, Defense Meritorious Service Medals (twice), Air Force Commendation Medal and NASA Space Flight Medals (six).

Hobbies: Brown's outside pursuits have included water and snow skiing, scuba diving, remote control model aircraft, restoring old cars, woodworking, sailing and aerobatic flying.

Hands-on Wildlife Programs

In this fast paced, high-tech world, it's good to slow down and learn about nature



"A Walk in the Woods" in Concord offers year-round environmental education outreach programs across the Piedmont to encourage people to respect and appreciate plants and animals. Programs are for all ages and include a slide show, hands-on artifacts and live animals for touching.

Other programs highlight coral reefs, wetlands, North Carolina wildlife and tropical rainforests. For a fee, owner Melody Bell Wilkes brings A Walk in the Woods programs to facilities in the Piedmont including schools, after-school programs, birthday parties, civic organizations, 4-H groups and Scouts. She can create programs suited to client needs or for the season, such as feeding winter birds. Call (704) 436-9048 or visit www.awalkinthewoods.us

You can learn about snakes, sea turtles, box turtles, freshwater turtles, fish, frogs, insects, butterflies, bats, iguanas, parrots, sharks, starfish, scorpions and tarantulas, and the habitats they live in.

We'd like to hear from you!

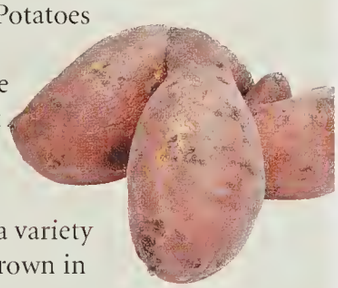
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Do You Know...

North Carolina produces more sweet potatoes than any state in the United States. North Carolina alone supplies 40% of the U.S. annual production.

Sweet potato facts:

- The Nutrition Action Health Letter rates 58 vegetables for six nutrients (Vitamins A and C, folate, iron, copper, and calcium), plus fiber. Sweet potatoes top the list with a whopping 582 points! A raw carrot came in next at 434.
- Sweet potatoes are as American as apple pie. Native Americans were already growing them when Columbus came to these shores in 1492.
- They are not potatoes—they are not even distant cousins! Potatoes are tubers while sweet potatoes are roots and are part of the morning glory family.
- A "yam" is really a variety of sweet potato grown in the South.



classroom chuckle

Teacher: Does anyone know which month has 28 days?

Pupil: All of them!

SURF IT!

For more about N.C. sweet potatoes, www.ncsweetpotatoes.com/kids.htm

For games, activities and learning resources from NASA, visit www.nasa.gov

By Carla Burgess

For Love of Mistletoe

Mistletoe has friends and foes. Some people want to know how they can grow it. Others desperately want to get rid of it. This time of year, the ayes win. With its dark-green, leathery leaves and milky-white berries, mistletoe is a beloved holiday decoration. In its natural environment, mistletoe adorns the boughs of trees, which play host to this semi-parasitic plant. It's "semi" because the plant is capable of making its own food through photosynthesis. But mistletoe depends on live trees to survive. It has root-like structures that tap into the flow of water and nutrients in the tree. The tree also provides physical support for the mistletoe plant, a small shrub that can grow to 3 feet in diameter.

Some commercial tree-growers consider mistletoe a pest because heavy infestations can eventually weaken trees, and eradication may be necessary. But mistletoe is a natural part of forest ecosystems, providing food and shelter for wildlife. Some birds and squirrels nest in the plants, and the berries are important in the diet of birds. The larvae of the great purple hairstreak butterfly feed exclusively on leaves of American mistletoe—also commonly called oak mistletoe or Christmas mistletoe.

As for ridding trees of mistletoe, the only safe and reliable way is to prune the offending branches (removing the plants is ineffective, as they will resprout). But keep in mind that pruning too many limbs from heavily infested trees will do more harm than the mistletoe.

To cultivate mistletoe on your own, take a cue from the birds, which are the primary dispersers of the seed. The berries consist of sticky pulp that contains the seed. One way that birds spread mistletoe seeds is by wiping their bills against a branch after they eat the berries, to clean off the pulp. The seeds stick to tree limbs and sprout there. To propagate mistletoe, crush a ripe berry and rub it onto a twig, preferably from the previous season's growth. (Be sure you use our native mistletoe, *Phoradendron leucarpum*.) Choose a deciduous tree that is susceptible to mistletoe—oaks, maples and other hardwoods are good candidates. If the seed germinates, the first leaf shoots may appear during the first year. Female plants will produce berries in about five years.



To help Christmas cactus bloom as long as possible, keep it in a cool location.

Daphne's Winter Perfume

Fragrant daphne, or *Daphne odora*, is like a breath of spring in winter. Its compact, mounded form and glossy, evergreen leaves are attractive, but the late-winter blossoms are this shrub's intoxicating lure. Rosy-pink or purple buds open to white or pinkish flowers with a heady scent reminiscent of gardenia or magnolia. A cut sprig in a bud vase is a remedy for winter blues. Daphne is notoriously temperamental—established plants may die unexpectedly with no apparent cause. But many gardeners think the payoff is worth the risk. Winter daphne usually grows about 3 to 4 feet tall and 2 to 4 feet wide. It is hardy in zones 7–9. The variegated variety 'Aureomarginata', whose leaves are edged in yellow or cream, is reportedly hardier than the species. Plant daphne in well-drained soil in sun to part-shade. If you have more than one plant, try a different location for each, to increase your chances of success.

Poinsettia Open House

More than 110 varieties of poinsettias, including new, experimental varieties, will be on display at the Poinsettia Open House, Dec. 4, at the JC Raulston Arboretum in Raleigh. The free event takes place 1–5 p.m. at the Ruby C. McSwain Education Center. N.C. State Floriculture, the co-sponsor, is part of a national program to test varieties of poinsettias that will most appeal to consumers and producers. Visitors to the open house will have a chance to vote on their favorites. The arboretum will also offer Holiday Landscape Tours on the grounds at 2 p.m., 2:30 p.m. and 3 p.m. The arboretum is located at 4415 Beryl Road. To learn more, call (919) 515-3132.

Hort Shorts

- Christmas cactus will bloom longer in a cool location. Do not let the soil dry out. Provide high light exposure. Prune after blooming by cutting or pinching off the stem tips. You may root these pieces in moist vermiculite to create new plants.
- Don't rush to prune tree branches after a winter storm. Sagging or bent branches may rebound satisfactorily. Prune any broken branches immediately.

Carla Burgess can be reached at ncgardenshare@mindspring.com

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For more gardening advice, go to the "Carolina Gardens" section of www.carolinacountry.com

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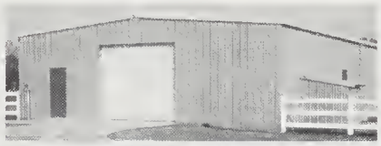
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By James Dulley

Radiant floor heating is comfortable and efficient



Electric radiant floor heating has been installed in existing and new home construction for many years. Although it is most often installed under tile or other solid flooring, some radiant floor heating systems are designed to be laid underneath carpeting. This makes installation very simple in almost any home. Even installing it under tile is not a terribly difficult job.

Electric radiant floor heat is a comfortable heating method for two reasons. First, the heat is concentrated down near the floor where you are. With forced air heating, the warmest air often ends up stagnating near the ceiling well above your head. Second, radiant heat directly warms your body, not just the room air, similar to how bright sun can warn you on a cold winter day.

Even though electric radiant floor heating is a form of electric resistance heating, it can still be relatively energy efficient. Instead of having to heat the room air to a temperature for your skin to feel comfortably warm as with other heating systems, radiant heat allows you to feel comfortable at a lower room temperature. The amount of heat lost from your house is a function of the indoor temperature, so by keeping it cooler, yet comfortable with radiant heat, less heat is lost.

Electric radiant floor heating can be used in just one or two rooms while you still use your furnace or heat pump for the majority of the home heating. By installing it in the rooms your family uses most often, especially at night when they are less active, you should be able to set your regular furnace thermostat lower and still be comfortable and save energy overall. This is most commonly done in bathrooms or kitchens with tile floors.

There are several designs of electric floor radiant heating systems that are applicable to residential construction. Some are best in new construction under tile while others are designed to be placed under hardwood floors or between the carpet pad and the carpeting. Some systems are sold in color-coded kit form, which includes all the wiring, heating elements (pads or cables) and a wall thermostat. Each room will have its own thermostat so you can zone heat your home for additional comfort and energy savings.

Most systems can be powered by either standard 120 or 240 volts so special house wiring is not needed. The simplest control is a standard line-voltage on-off thermostat. Some have a built-in thermometer and others just have graduations on a dial from warm to hot. For the best comfort and efficiency, computerized digital thermostats are available. These sense both floor and air temperatures to precisely control the amount and timing of the heat. These also allow you to vary the temperature for four different periods throughout the day and night.

A common radiant system for tile floors uses heating cable beneath the tile. The manufacturers will work with you or your contractor to advise you about how much cable is needed to crisscross the floor to provide adequate heating. Once the cable is attached to the subflooring, a thin layer of thinset mortar is spread over this and the tile is applied. If your house is built over a basement, some cable systems are designed also to be installed between the floor joists from below.

Another option is a fiberglass mesh with the heating cable already woven through it. This makes installation much simpler. The mesh and cable is only ⅛-inch thick so it easily fits under tile, stone or hardwood floors. Since the density of the cable per square foot is fixed with this method, you have less flexibility for the total heat output in a room.

There are several options for under-carpet applications. In one, a fine heating element is sandwiched between several layers of aluminum foil laminate. It is only 1/16-inch thick, but durable, and is placed between the carpeting and the padding. Another design for use under carpeting, hardwood or floating floors, uses a mesh screen to create the heat. The standard house voltage is stepped down to a safe low-voltage that actually flows through the heating screen. This is very easy to install.

Write for (instantly download —www.dulley.com) Utility Bills Update No. 888—a buyer's guide of nine electric warm floor system manufacturers listing design types, sizes/heat outputs, common applications, comfort controls and installation instructions. Please include $3.00 and a business-size SASE.

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5 weeks before issue date.



Cranberry Nut Dessert

- 1¼ cups fresh or frozen cranberries
- ¼ cup packed brown sugar
- ¼ cup chopped walnuts
- 1 egg
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ⅓ cup butter, melted

Place cranberries in a greased 9-inch pie plate; sprinkle with brown sugar and nuts. In a small mixing bowl, beat egg; gradually add sugar. Beat in the flour and butter; mix well. Pour over berries. Bake at 325 degrees for 40–45 minutes or until golden brown. Serve warm.

Yield: 6–8 servings.



Eggnog Mini Loaves

- 2¼ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup eggnog*
- ½ cup butter, melted
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 teaspoons rum extract

In a large bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, salt, cinnamon and nutmeg. In another bowl, beat the eggs, sugar, eggnog, butter and extracts; stir into dry ingredients just until moistened.

Pour into three greased 5¾-by-3-by-2-inch loaf pans. Bake at 350 degrees for 30–35 minutes or until toothpick inserted near the center comes out clean. Cool for 10 minutes before removing from pans to wire racks.

Yield. 3 loaves.

** This recipe was tested with commercially prepared eggnog.*



Ham & Cheese Tarts

- 2 packages (3 ounces each) cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup French onion dip
- 1 tablespoon milk
- ¼ teaspoon ground mustard
- ¼ teaspoon grated orange peel
- ½ cup finely chopped fully-cooked ham
- 1 tube (12 ounces) refrigerated buttermilk biscuits
- ¼ teaspoon paprika

In a small mixing bowl, beat the cream cheese, onion dip, milk, mustard and orange peel until blended. Stir in ham. Split each biscuit into thirds; press into lightly greased miniature muffin cups. Spoon a scant tablespoonful of ham mixture into each cup; sprinkle with paprika. Bake at 375 degrees for 12–17 minutes or until golden brown. Serve warm.

Yield: 2½ dozen.



Creamy Swiss Spinach Dip

- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 package (9 ounces) frozen creamed spinach, thawed
- 2 cups diced Swiss cheese
- 2 unsliced round loaves (1 pound each) Italian or French bread

In a small microwave-safe mixing bowl, beat cream cheese and garlic powder until smooth. Stir in spinach and Swiss cheese. Cover; microwave on high for 5–8 minutes or until cheese is melted, stirring occasionally.

Meanwhile, cut a 4-inch circle in the center of one loaf of bread. Remove bread, leaving 1 inch at bottom of loaf. Cut removed bread and the second loaf into 1½-inch cubes. Spoon hot spinach dip into bread shell. Serve with bread cubes.

Yield: 3½ cups.

Recipes are by Taste of Home magazine. For a sample copy, send $2 to Taste of Home, Suite 4321, PO Box 990, Greendale WI 53129-0990. Visit the Web page at www.tasteofhome.com

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